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Early Recollections of Old Noxubee

J. J. Haynie in Shuqualak New Era

A tragedy which is perhaps still in the memory of some, but may prove interesting to others, was the assassination of a Mr. Brantley of Alabama, by a man by the name of Eskridge at the Shuqulak depot in the winter of 1870 just before the daylight hour. It seems that Brantley was a prominent planter and worked quite a number of negroes on his place, so many in fact as to require an overseer and that this man Eskridge was his overseer.

Brantley, two months before he landed in Shuqualak, killed one of his negro tenants, and had left home on horseback to hunt a place of immunity until the excitement cooled down, leaving Eskridge in full charge of his business, and reaching Shuqualak he decided to go no further, so put up at a hotel, and stayed there until the night he was murdered.

All during his two months stay he corresponded with his wife under an assumed name and used a cipher code of his own make up with which to keep any one who might open his letters from knowing what he was talking about when asking his wife in these letters how things were going regarding the killing, and in the same way he corresponded with his overseer, Eskredge.

For two months Brantley was in Shuqualak no one knew what he was there for except Tom Dunlap, to whom he confided his troubles, Dunlap being the [illegible] then. Eskredge was a fine looking man, really handsome in face and form and a swell dresser, and Brantley's wife was a prepossessing woman in form and facial beauty, and it was this man that Brantley left to board and sleep in his home and to take care of his property, wife and one child in his absence, and as many such cases turn out, Eskredge, in his many dining table talks with Mrs. Brantley learned from her that Brantley's life was insured for $10,000, besides the vast property he owned, and thinking how nice it would be, boldly proposed to Mrs. Brantley for him some night to dress in disguise and ride over to Shuqualak and assassinate Brantley and return and either divide the policy money, or else marry and the two own all the property of Brantley as well as the $10,000 insurance, he contending that Brantley would never get out of his trouble and as it was she would be a widow all her life, she, (according to Eskredge at his trial) agreeing to this last proposition. After a few days Eskredge left the Brantley home on his murderous trip, having first disguised himself by shaving off his mustache, shaving off his suit of flowing raven black hair, dressing himself up as a farm hand and carrying with him on his white horse he rode, a double barrel gun sawed off and wrapped in paper, and bringing along with him a white head cloth with eye holes cut in it to use in the assassination act, and wearing a big, steel gray, man's shawl (it was the fashion then) and was needed, for the night of the assassination was bitter cold.

The arrangement for the assassination was cleverly made, but bluntly carried out, Mrs. Brantley, two weeks before the fatal night having written Bantley that her love for him was so great and the absence from him so lonesome and hard to bear that she was going to visit him (naming in her letter the night and the hour 4:40 a. m.) and for him not to disappoint her but be at the train to meet her.

In those days (there being no railroad telegraph service) agents were required to sleep in their station buildings at night, and Tom Dunlap had him a nice little bedroom in the rear of his ticket office, with a double bed and a wall and door between the two rooms, and that night when the southbound 11 o'clock train arrived, Brantley was at the depot and after the train had gone told Dunlap that his wife would be there on the northbound train at 4 a. m. and asked him to let him share his bed with him 'till then, which Dunlap did and Brantley went in and undressed and crawled over on the back side and was soon asleep, Dunlap occupying the front side and there they slept until the station porter (old Squire Hudson, a trusty old darkey) came knocking at the door, saying that it was then 3:30 and time to get up. Dunlap got up immediately, but Brantley asked to let him sleep a few minutes longer, which Dunlap did. Opening up the station and walking out to see if he could hear the train coming, for the night was unusually still, Dunlap espied a strange looking figure restlessly promenading the platform (it was Eskredge) and asking him what he wanted, he replied by asking where a man by the name of Brantley could be found, Dunlap telling him that Brantley was asleep in the depot bedroom, (a fire had been made in the office stove by the porter in the meantime) and in a few seconds Eskredge, with his old slouch hat pulled down over his eyes, walked in to near the stove, (Dunlap could see that he had something under the shawl) and after warming a little he told Dunlap to wake Brantley up and tell him a man wanted to see him and when Dunlap started in to awake Brantley, Eskredge raised the window looking south and shoved the wooden blind back, and walked out on the platform and took his stand at this open window and as Brantley emerged from the bedroom and had gotten opposite the stove, Eskredge pulled the loaded sawed off gun he carried from under his shawl and taking deliberate aim, fired, literally tearing Brantley's head off, after which he fled to a water oak [illegible] 50 yards back of the station where he had a big fine white horse hitched and galloped out of town in an easterly direction, the noise of the gun having awakened the citizens and they plainly hearing the noise the horse made with his feet in getting out of town, and in this way they knew the direction the murderer went.

In ten minutes after the murder the train arrived, going north with Mrs. Brantley on board, in the meantime the few at the station, brought there by the noise, (none of them even dreaming that Mrs. Brantley was a party to the killing, this fact developed afterward) hurriedly arranged as to who would break the news to Mrs. Brantley, they centering upon the oldest man, Col. Thomas Haynes, and he requesting her to go on to Macon as her dead husband, mangled as he was, was in no condition for her to see, and for her to return on the daylight train, 10 a. m. the next day, which was done.

Daylight soon coming and Miss Martha Ann Haynes having been awakened by the gunshot, having told that she saw a man on a spotless white horse pass their place riding in an easterly direction at breakneck speed, a posse was hurriedly organized by sunup and started out after the murderer, finding it easy to track him, as all four of the horses' feet were freshly shod and the tracks showing that the horse was running and after a ride of eight miles the posse came up on Eskride, finding him asleep near the road and his horse tied, they arresting him and bringing him back, his trial taking place in the old store house, first south of Dunlap residence, where he was committed to await the action of the grand jury and sent to Macon, where the circuit court sentenced him to death, he afterwards escaping and going to Texas, where he was discovered by a drummer, (old man Neville who included Shuqualak in his territory) and was arrested and brought back and re sentenced, but before the execution, was pardoned by A. K. Davis, a negro, who was then lieutenant-governor, (acting as governor during the governor's absence).

A month after Eskridge's first trial it developed that Mrs. Brantley was a party to the killing and she was arrested, tried and sent to the Macon jail for two years, which time she served.

Alas for man's duplicity and woman's wiles—Brantley died unhonored and unsung in 1870 and Mrs. Brantley blasted a life of affluence and happiness through the overtures and effulgence of a man far below her social standing, while Shuqualak was made the site and the victim of the pulling off of this disgraceful tragedy.

The Prospects of Peace

During the past few weeks there have been many rumors that peace in Europe is near. There is no doubt that the people in all the belligerent countries desire peace ardently and that they are weary of the contest and its sacrifices. All the world outside the theatre of war equally desire an end of the cruel destruction that has been going on for almost two years. Our own government stands ready to invite nations to cease hostilities and to confer together as soon as there is any prospect that peace will be considered.

But is peace possible now, or in the immediate future, or at any time before one of the two great combinations is victorious and the other conquered? In other words, is it possible that the conflict shall end, as many writers suggest, in a draw? It is, at any rate, not profitless to consider what stands in the way of such a result.

The Youth's Companion has lately presented in a series of articles the purposes of each of the [illegible]eral nations in the event of vi[illegible]. A draw, a fruitless result [illegible] blood and treasure, would mean the disappointment of every nation. Since the allies of both sides have bound themselves each not to make a [illegible]parate peace, must Germany and Austria, as well as France, Russia, Great Britain and Italy, renounce all hope of gain, and agree to a restoration of the situation as it was before July, 1914? Is such a restoration conceivable? Let us consider what it would mean.

Austria began the war by attacking Serbia for refusing to accept the terms of its ultimatum. A return to the situation that existed before Austria sent the ultimatum means a withdrawal of the Austrian demands, the restoration of the Serbian government, and an end of the Austrian pretensions to any right or control over it. Such a result might be called a draw, but Austria would regard it as a defeat, all the more galling because it has completely conquered Serbia. On the other hand, it would be a defeat for Russia if Serbia were not wholly restored to all its territorial, political and dynastic rights.

Then there is Belgium. What arrangement can be devised that will be consistent with the theory of victory for neither party? The plan might provide that Germany should restore all the conquered Belgian territory and permit the King to return to Brussels; it might even provide for a new treaty of neutrality. But Belgium has been devastated and impoverished by the imposition of fines upon its cities and citizens; its beautiful cathedrals and other fine buildings lie in ruins. Who is to make the loss good? Is it conceivable that the Entente Allies will pay for the destruction that their enemies have wrought, or that Germany will pay, or that both parties will leave the injury unredressed? A victory for one side or for the other would make those questions unnecessary to consider; the conqueror would decide the matter. But the result would not be a draw if Belgium were left to suffer the consequences of a war it did not provoke.

Somewhat the same thing may be said of France. The question of Alsace and Lorraine might cause no difficulty; however unwillingly, France might permit Germany to keep what it held two years ago. But its northern territory has been ravaged and its industrial plants seized and used against it. Germany has been left almost intact. France would hardly be satisfied with a draw that left it to bear the losses it has suffered, while Germany merely retired behind its old boundary and suffered nothing beyond the casualties of a war on foreign soil.

The situation of England differs widely from that of any of its allies. It is not interested in any questions of territory, except as regards the African colonies that it has wrested from Germany. Those it might give up again if the allies were to consent to a draw and if a draw were possible. Nevertheless, the greatest and most earnest resolve of Great Britain has been to put an end to militarism in Europe, and in particular to the Prussia system. In any arrangement that has the nature of a draw that purpose must be abandoned. That does not go to prove that such an arrangement cannot be made; but it does raise the question whether Great Britain can consent to a plan of peace that leaves the way open for a renewal of the terrible conflict when the enemy has recuperated—still worse, one that will require Britain to arm itself and imitate the very militarism that it detests.

A draw that is really a draw would leave the whole Eastern question undecided—and Europe will never be free from the danger of a general war until that matter is settled. Russia and Austria would still contest for superior influence over the Balkan states. The centuries-old desire of Russia for Constantinople and a free outlet to the ocean by way of the Dardanelles would remain as a motive for a future war. Those facts, of course, do not make a draw impossible; they do make it unlikely that Russia will agree to a draw—a result highly undesirable for Russia.

And would Japan be willing to restore to Germany the islands in the Pacific that it has captured?

Moreover, the Entente Allies are bound each to the others by solemn promise not to make a separate peace. It follows that no one of them can or will consent to peace on terms satisfactory to itself, but not to all. Great Britain, for example, will not agree to terms that indemnify Belgium if Russia does not receive fair treatment. There can be no material compromises; the interests of one of the combatants cannot be played off against the interests of another.

If the foregoing statements and considerations be accepted as valid, their obvious teaching is that a draw is out of the question and that the war must continue until it has a definite result in a victory for one side or for the other. A draw would not be desirable if it were practicable. The hope of the future is that this may be the last great war. It will not be the last if the issues are [illegible]ke—and they are many—are not now decided once for all.

"Mail for the Soldier Boys"

Mail for the soldier boys who have gone to the front should be plainly addressed in order to insure its prompt receipt by addressee.

The name of the addressee should be fully and legibly written with pen and ink, give his rank, company, regiment or other organization to which attached. The postage should be fully prepaid, and name and address of sender written in upper left-hand corner on address side.

Parcel post matter sent should be substantially and tightly wrapped in either very strong paper or cloth, and with strong twine tightly and securely tied.

As this is a matter important to all concerned; other papers will please copy.

Present address of the Louisiana Troop is "Camp Stafford, Alexandria, Louisiana." The Mississippi troops are at "Camp Swep Taylor, Jackson, Mississippi."